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ABSTRACT

The competence of directors and administrators of children's programs is very important to quality, and efforts that seek to bring directors and administrators more support and help them to develop their competencies are worth examination. This paper begins by briefly discussing "A Preliminary Overview of Director Credentialing Initiatives" compiled by "Taking the Lead: Investing in Early Childhood Leadership for the 21st Century," a national early childhood leadership development initiative designed to build the capacity of the field to increase program quality. This discussion includes mention of "thorny" issues in the development of a credential, including: (1) the amount of training/education required; (2) the levels of the training/education; and (3) an assessment system to determine whether the person should be granted a credential. The remainder of the paper discusses career development versus the credentialist approach to a credential, offering discussion of eight differences between the two approaches and the reasons for The Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education's support for the career development approach. (EV)

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Taking The Lead

Investing in Early Childhood Leadership for the 21st Century

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Promising Practices in Director Credentialing

by Gwen Morgan
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Promising Practices and Common Issues in Director Credentialing

In 1997, there is a high degree of interest in credentialing directors. Multiple director credentialing efforts have sprung up around the country, almost as if by spontaneous combustion. Early this year, *Taking the Lead: Investing in Early Childhood Leadership for the 21st Century* (*Taking the Lead*)—a national early childhood leadership development initiative designed to build the capacity of the field to increase program quality—compiled *A Preliminary Overview of Director Credentialing Initiatives*. This overview, available in the initiative's *Director Credentialing Info Pack*, gives a good picture of this fairly recent attention to directors in 13 states and nationally.

The competence of directors and administrators of children's programs is so important to quality that any effort that seeks to bring them more support and helps to develop their competencies is a promising practice. Separately and together, the 13 director credentialing efforts profiled in the overview are all promising practices.

Some of the efforts appear to be simply academic preparation in one college, but even these are promising developments given the dearth of training programs for directors over the past quarter century. Later on, credentialing efforts in these locations may spread to include more than one college, but any good program for directors should be welcomed.

There is a national credential based in the National Child Care Association (NCCA). Its base in the association is promising because credentialing efforts need a credible professional base to give them strength. That credential is probably the equivalent of one course. In contrast, the Wisconsin credential for administrators requires 18 credits or six courses. In Mississippi, the state has supported a credential at 80 clock hours, and has recently added more hours.

These differences in the amount of training create challenges that must be dealt with eventually. What happens when a director who is credentialed by NCCA, or has received a credential in the state of Mississippi, wants a credential in Wisconsin? The Wisconsin group will need to establish what the prior credential is worth in Wisconsin (i.e., how much of it counts toward the Wisconsin credential).

Wisconsin's credential is based in a statewide professional organization called the Registry, which is governed by WECA (that state's Association for the Education of Young Children group), the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators' Association, the Wisconsin Family Child Care Association, and the Head Start Association. The School-age Association may also be participating in this collaboration; that would be a logical next step. The guidance of these professional groups, working in concert, gives credibility to the credential.

Texas has two different credentialing efforts. In this state, a credential will be required by licensing in 1999. By that time, the two groups will hopefully have joined forces to decide how to define the relationship of one credential to the other.

In Massachusetts, a group has been working on director credentialing for years, but has not found a statewide organization with the strength to support a credential. They have wished for a national base. In the meantime, they have developed a self-assessment tool for directors.

There are some thorny issues in the development of a credential, including:

- the amount of training/education required;
- the levels of the training/education; and
- an assessment system to determine whether the person should be granted to credential.

Each of these issues needs to be worked out and will demand considerable time and attention; it will be impossible to resolve all of them at once. Fortunately, each effort will not need to invent all of its own wheels. With so many groups working on an administrator's credential, plenty of model solutions to these issues will emanate from multiple locations to be adapted and further improved.

As we tackle the thorny issues, and share ideas from one place to another, it is wise to reflect on changes in the public climate of opinion that will affect our success. As we move into the twenty-first century, it appears that change is in the air, and that there are older assumptions about credentials, and about professionalism, that we may be wise not to carry with us into the next century.

One belief that appears to be coming with us into the twenty-first century is the public view that a person with a bachelor's degree should earn more money. A graduate of a high quality community college program will not be likely to earn as much as the graduate of a poor bachelor's program. What will be different is the expanded number of pathways to access the bachelor's degree, necessary to equity in our country. The two-year graduate must have access to the bachelor's degree and must be able to articulate credit from one level to the next. That is a challenge that many states are working on successfully already. As the professional community, we have to insist on high quality in all bachelor's degree programs aimed at children's program directors and administrators.

The Career Development vs. The Credentialist Approach to A Credential

At The Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education at Wheelock College, we strongly support the development of a director credential, but we are not credentialists. We take a career development approach to a credential, rather than a credentialist approach. A career development approach does not replace credentials but puts them into a coherent system of roles, training, access, and credit. Although nobody can foresee the future, we have examined current thinking about credentials and professional recognition, and we believe that the career approach is the one likely to characterize public views in the first few decades of the next century.

In the pages that follow, we outline some of the differences we have discovered between the two approaches:

1. The career development approach stresses that for many members of our field educational and career goals build gradually over time, rather than after a single declaration upon entry into a four-year program. Many individuals from poor families and underrepresented groups cannot conceive of themselves applying for loans or scholarships to pursue four-year degrees. They may, however, be able to envision taking individual courses or getting Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials. Once they have CDA's, they can see themselves moving forward to achieve associate's degrees, particularly if colleges grant credit for the CDA. Once they attain associate's degrees, they can see themselves entering four-year programs.

   As these individuals undergo a variety of experiences, gaining in self-confidence and awareness of the field, their intentions unfold. They may need much more and different kinds of support as they pass the earlier milestones, but many of them have talents and abilities that they are not given credit for in traditional thinking. At Wheelock College, every student who first entered the institution through a certificate program designed for low-income participants, and who later decided to enter the bachelor's degree program, is on the dean's list.

2. We emphasize the importance of access to credit-bearing training, so that milestone credentials are accessible and so that they can articulate to higher academic levels. A study done by The Center five years ago found that too much child care training takes the form of workshops, conferences, and non-credit training. We are glad to see child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) forming alliances with community colleges and offering training for credit.

3. We see the usefulness of credentialing at different levels, offering recognition for milestones achieved, rather than a terminal credential. We think of learning and growth for professionals as lifelong, not as a permanent plateau.

4. Our field consists of a wide variety of roles for which a person can plan their own career through additional preparation. This view is in contrast to the idea of a single credential for a single role, teacher, which has dominated the last century. Some of the roles are assisting roles, while others carry major responsibility. However, we do not see our field as divided between a professional class and a non-professional class. We see those in helping roles as participating in professional training and becoming more highly qualified professionals in the future.

5. Of central importance to our profession is diversity, since we are a field that serves diverse children and families. It is unacceptable to us if the leaders we send to work with diverse communities do not reflect the ethnic character of the community. If members of children's families and communities are not represented in the leadership of the programs that serve the community, children receive a powerful message that these individuals, and also they themselves, are not seen as worthy of leadership.

6. We think of credit as currency, for equity of recognition, and as a basis for salary equity in the future. We want to maintain high standards, and the same standards, for credit, because credit is like money in the bank to move to a higher level in the field.

7. Among the competencies for those who work with children, we see caring relationships as equally or more important than a scientific knowledge base traditionally identified in credentials. We know in our work, and in new brain development research, that relationships are essential to education. You can't educate without caring. Yet, content on caring has not become common in professional preparation programs for us, as it has in nursing.

8. Reforms in the career development system require major structural and content changes across colleges. Reforms from a credentialist perspective would also require changes in higher education, but less drastic. Efforts to develop credentials for directors will need to focus on change in higher education.

This article is intended to provoke thinking and discussion about director credentialing in the field of early care and education. We urge you to respond to the thinking presented in this piece. Study, ponder, and debate each and every of the elements we have mentioned, and identify those we have yet to propose. Please write down your comments and ideas, send them to us, and share them with others. Exercise your leadership. Your thoughtful contributions will inform this very important work and will bring us closer to the vision we all have—of a field working more effectively than ever before on behalf of the quality of life for all children and families.

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